CONCEPT OF GOD IN HINDUISM

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1. Common Concept of God in Hinduism:

Hinduism is commonly perceived as a polytheistic religion. Indeed, most Hindus would attest to this, by professing belief in multiple Gods. While some Hindus believe in the existence of three gods, some believe in thousands of gods, and some others in thirty three crore i.e. 330 million Gods. However, learned Hindus, who are well versed in their scriptures, insist that a Hindu should believe in and worship only one God.

The major difference between the Hindu and the Muslim perception of God is the common Hindus' belief in the philosophy of Pantheism. Pantheism considers everything, living and non-living, to be divine and sacred. The common Hindu, therefore, considers everything as God. He considers the trees as God, the sun as God, the moon as God, the animals as God and even human beings as manifestations of God!

Islam, on the contrary, exhorts man to consider himself and his surroundings as examples of divine creation rather than as divinity itself. Muslims therefore believe that everything is God's i.e. the word 'God' with an apostrophe 's'. In other words the Muslims believe that everything belongs to God. The trees belong to God, the sun belongs to God, the moon belongs to God and everything in this universe belongs to God.

Thus the major difference between the Hindu and the Muslim beliefs is the difference of the apostrophe 's'. The Hindu says everything is God. The Muslim says everything is God's.

2. Concept of God according to Hindu Scriptures:

We can gain a better understanding of the concept of God in Hinduism by analysing Hindu scriptures.

BHAGAVAD GITA

The most popular amongst all the Hindu scriptures is the Bhagavad Gita.

Consider the following verse from the Gita:

"Those whose intelligence has been stolen by material desires surrender unto demigods and follow the particular rules and regulations of worship according to their own natures."

[Bhagavad Gita 7:20]

The Gita states that people who are materialistic worship demigods i.e. 'gods' besides the True God.

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UPANISHADS:

The Upanishads are considered sacred scriptures by the Hindus.

The following verses from the Upanishads refer to the Concept of God:

i) "Ekam evadvitiyam"
"He is One only without a second."
[Chandogya Upanishad 6:2:1][1]

ii) "Na casya kascij janita na cadhipah."
"Of Him there are neither parents nor lord."
[Svetasvatara Upanishad 6:9][2]

iii) "Na tasya pratima asti"
"There is no likeness of Him."
[Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:19][3]

iv) The following verses from the Upanishad allude to the inability of man to imagine God in a particular form:

"Na samdrse tisthati rupam asya, na caksusa pasyati kas canainam."

"His form is not to be seen; no one sees Him with the eye."
[Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:20][4]

[1] [The Principal Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan page 447 and 448]
[Sacred books of the East, volume 1 'The Upanishads part I' page 93]

[2] [The Principal Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan page 745]
[Sacred Books of the East, volume 15, 'The Upanishads part II' page 263.]

[3] [The Principal Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan page 736 & 737]
[Sacred Books of the East, volume 15, 'The Upanishads part II' page no 253]

[4] [The Principal Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan page 737]
[Sacred Books of the East, volume 15, 'The Upanishads part II' page no 253]

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THE VEDAS

Vedas are considered the most sacred of all the Hindu scriptures. There are four main Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samveda and Atharvaveda.

1. Yajurveda

The following verses from the Yajurveda echo a similar concept of God:

i) "na tasya pratima asti"
"There is no image of Him."
[Yajurveda 32:3][5]

ii) "shudhama poapvidham"
"He is bodyless and pure."
[Yajurveda 40:8][6]

iii) "Andhatama pravishanti ye asambhuti mupaste"
"They enter darkness, those who worship the natural elements" (Air, Water, Fire, etc.). "They sink deeper in darkness, those who worship sambhuti."
[Yajurveda 40:9][7]

'Sambhuti' means created things, for example table, chair, idol, etc.

The Yajurveda contains the following prayer:

"Lead us to the good path and remove the sin that makes us stray and wander."
[Yajurveda 40:16][8]

[5] [Yajurveda by Devi Chand M.A. page 377]

[6] [Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph T. H. Giffith page 538]

[7] [Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph T. H. Giffith page 538]

[8] [Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph T. H. Griffith page 541]

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2. Atharvaveda

The Atharvaveda praises God in the following verse:

i) "Dev maha osi"
"God is verily great"
[Atharvaveda 20:58:3][9]

3. Rigveda

i) The oldest of all the vedas is Rigveda. It is also the one considered most sacred by the Hindus. The Rigveda states:

"Sages (learned Priests) call one God by many names."
[Rigveda 1:164:46]

ii) The Rigveda gives several different attributes to Almighty God. Many of these are mentioned in Rigveda Book 2 hymn 1.

Among the various attributes of God, one of the beautiful attributes mentioned in the Rigveda Book II hymn 1 verse 3, is 'Brahma'. 'Brahma' means 'The Creator'. Translated into Arabic it means 'Khaliq'. Muslims can have no objection if Almighty God is referred to as 'Khaliq' or 'Creator' or 'Brahma'. However if it is said that 'Brahma' is Almighty God who has four heads with each head having a crown, Muslims take strong exception to it.

Describing Almighty God in anthropomorphic terms also goes against the following verse of Yajurveda:

"Na tasya Pratima asti"
"There is no image of Him."
[Yajurveda 32:3]

Another beautiful attribute of God mentioned in the Rigveda Book II hymn 1 verse 3 is 'Vishnu'. 'Vishnu' means 'The Sustainer'. Translated into Arabic it means 'Rabb'. Again, Muslims can have no objection if Almighty God is referred to as 'Rabb' or 'Sustainer' or 'Vishnu'. But the popular image of

[9] [Atharveda Samhita vol 2 William Dwight Whitney page 910]

Vishnu among Hindus, is that of a God who has four arms, with one of the right arms holding the 'Chakra', i.e. a discus and one of the left arms holding a 'conch shell', riding a bird or reclining on a snake couch. Muslims can never accept any image of God. As mentioned earlier this also goes against Svetasvatara Upanishad Chapter 4 verse 19.

"Na tasya pratima asti"
"There is no likeness of Him"

The following verses from the Rigveda refer to the Unity and Glory of the Supreme Being:

iii) "Ma cid anyad vi sansata sakhayo ma rishanyata"
"O friends, do not worship anybody but Him, the Divine One. Praise Him alone."

[Rigveda 8:1:1][10]

iv) "Devasya samituk parishtutih"
"Verily, great is the glory of the Divine Creator."
[Rigveda 5:1:81][11]

Brahma Sutra of Hinduism:

The Brahma Sutra of Hinduism is:

"Ekam Brahm, dvitiya naste neh na naste kinchan"

"There is only one God, not the second; not at all, not at all, not in the least bit."

Thus only a dispassionate study of the Hindu scriptures can help one understand the concept of God in Hinduism.

[10] [Rigveda Samhita vol. 9, pages 2810 and 2811 by Swami Satya Prakash Sarasvati and Satyakam Vidyalankar]

[11] [Rigveda Samhita vol. 6, pages 1802 and 1803 by Swami Satya Prakash Saraswati and Satyakam Vidyalankar]